

**California Biodiversity Council**  
**“Biodiversity Along the Border”**

**September 27-28, 2006**

**Meeting Notes**

The California Biodiversity Council (CBC), met in September, 2006 for a meeting that became one of its most memorable events in over 15 years. The meeting in Coronado addressed “Biodiversity Along the Border” through collaboration not only among the Council’s member agencies, but also with several key Mexican governmental entities.

This 2-day meeting began with a field trip attended by a record-breaking 80+ people, including CBC Members and other interested individuals from the non-profit sector and the general public. The trip began with a stop at the Otay Mesa - Mesa de Otay border area, an area that is considered to be very critical for binational planning efforts with Tijuana. There participants learned about the Las Californias Binational Conservation Initiative, a vision for habitat conservation in the border region.

By early afternoon, the field trip reached its main destination, Los Laureles Canyon, a critical sub-basin of the Tijuana River Watershed. The Los Laureles Canyon drains directly into the Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve (TRNERR) in California and is a major source of sediment and waste in the Estuary. The sub-basin has become increasingly degraded by development that lacks the most basic infrastructure. An impressive ceremony took place in this canyon with city of Tijuana officials, including Mayor Jorge Hank Rhon, and California representatives including CBC Co-Chair and BLM State Director Mike Pool, SANDAG Board Member and City of Del Mar Mayor Crystal Crawford, Imperial Beach City Councilmember Patricia McCoy, State Coastal Conservancy Executive Officer Sam Schuchat, and California State Parks Director Ruth Coleman. The ceremony dedicated a playground facility to the residents of Los Laureles. But more importantly, the ceremony signified an agreement of cooperation from both sides of the border to work towards improving conditions in Los Laureles and TRNERR. As any member of the planning committee could testify, planning an international field trip for a large group amidst heightened border security was not easy, but it was well worth all the work. CBC Members will remember it for years to come.

The day's field trip was followed by a dinner in Coronado with featured speaker Dr. Exequiel Ezcurra of the San Diego Natural History Museum. His fascinating talk enlightened CBC participants about the history of the area they'd come to study for two days.

The second day of "Biodiversity Along the Border" was held in Coronado and consisted of presentations and discussions of the border-area conservation topics seen the day before. The CBC and audience heard first from Jerre Stallcup, Conservation Biology Institute and Dr. Paul Ganster, Institute for Regional Studies of the Californias, SDSU, with an overview of existing and potential Trans-border Cooperation in the California - Baja California Borderlands. Next, Dr. Scott Morrison (The Nature Conservancy) and Miguel Angel Vargas and Fernando Ochoa (Pronatura) presented on the Las Californias Binational Conservation Initiative: A vision for habitat conservation in the California-Baja California borderlands. Oscar Romo (Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve, California State Parks) offered a video and talk about Los Laureles Canyon, his project's accomplishments, and some ways in which the CBC might be able to contribute to his efforts. Finally, Elisa Arias (San Diego Association of Governments) informed the group of the Otay Mesa-Mesa de Otay Binational Corridor Strategic Plan, a cross-border collaborative planning effort headed by SANDAG.

In addition to the talks and presentations, the day's highlights included the signing of an MOU by the Honorable Jorge Hank Rhon, Mayor, City of Tijuana and Ruth Coleman, Director, California State Parks. The MOU establishes "a common interest for the environmental health of the Tijuana River Estuary, as has been demonstrated by cooperative efforts focused in the "Laureles" canyon by creating a land use plan, as well as the work focused on the creation of a model community of sustainable design and environmental sensitivity." In the afternoon, in response to the wealth of information received over the course of two days, the Council decided to take some action. At the proposal of the Co-Chairs, the CBC agreed to form a new "Biodiversity Along the Border Committee" that would consist of CBC member agencies, officials from Mexico, and other key partners. The purpose of the committee was described in a memo from the Co-Chairs as "to explore the feasibility of implementing the following proposed projects: 1) Las Californias Binational Conservation Initiative, 2) Conservation Easements, and 3) Tijuana River Valley Management. The formation of a binational committee to implement these projects recognizes that a coordinated approach to managing natural resources between the two states requires frequent dialogue. The committee's first meeting was on January 30, 2007 in Imperial Beach.